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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1303
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 1759
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 2134
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RUEHFL/AMCONSUL FLORENCE PRIORITY 1889
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SUBJECT: ITALY DISTANCES ITSELF FROM SPANISH-FRENCH MEPP
INITIATIVE

Classified By: Political M/C David D. Pearce for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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¶1. (C/NF) Summary. MFA Officials took pains November 17 to distance Italy from the Middle East Initiative announced by Spain. They said while the Middle East Peace Process was a top priority for Italy, it was crucial to coordinate any such initiative carefully: first within the EU, then with the U.S., then with Israel and finally with moderate Arab countries. One senior MFA official said the GOI was not interested in headlines or useless pieces of paper. End Summary.

¶2. (C/NF) MFA Near East Office Director Luciano Pezzotti called Political M/C November 17 to do what he termed "damage control" following the announcement of the Spanish-French MEPP Initiative. He said the Italian Embassy in Washington would also be following up with the State Department. Carlo Formosa, Special Assistant to MFA DG for Middle East Ragaglini, in a separate phone call to poloff said he hoped the U.S. had understood from FM D'Alema's public statements Italy's cool reaction to the Spanish announcement, which had taken Italy by surprise.

¶3. (C) Pezzotti pointed out that while PM Prodi confirmed in his public statement that he had spoken with French President Chirac and Spanish PM Zapatero, Prodi's statement noted that any format eventually agreed upon had to be capable of achieving tangible, effective, lasting results. Pezzotti said this meant it was not enough for a handful of Mediterranean countries to launch a separate initiative on their own. He said the Germans and the UK had to be involved and there should be a Quint (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, UK) discussion, followed by a wider EU-level discussion. He said for any initiative, even if endorsed by the full EU 25, to be useful, it would also have to be coordinated with the U.S., Israel, and moderate Arab countries.

¶4. (C/NF) To underline his point, Pezzotti said Spanish FM Moratinos had called Italian FM D'Alema and proposed a trip to the Middle East by the Spanish, French and Italian Foreign Ministers. D'Alema had firmly declined, asking "why launch an initiative that will be dead at the outset?" Moratinos followed by suggesting a meeting of the three foreign ministers, which D'Alema also turned down.

¶5. (C/NF) Pezzotti said Italy wanted a common EU position. He said that it was their understanding the French were also

irritated with the Spanish announcement of the so-called initiative because, although the countries are like-minded in the sense that they want to see progress on the peace process, they are not at all like-minded on methodology. Pezzotti said Italy was "not interested in useless pieces of paper or in making headlines. The history of the Middle East is littered with such announcements. What we are interested in is a new working methodology."

¶6. (C) POL M/C told Pezzotti he should be sure to brief the Israelis carefully on this initiative and Italy's position. Pezzotti said he already had.

¶7. (C) Egyptian DCM Abu Bakr Hefny Mahmoud also called poloff November 17 to discuss the Spanish-French initiative. He said he had already touched base with the Italians who had indicated their surprise at the announcement and desire to see the initiative discussed at the EU level.

Comment

¶8. (C/NF) The speed with which the GOI contacted us to distance themselves from the Spanish-French initiative is noteworthy. While FM D'Alema has made clear to us that no issue has a higher priority, he knows that no Middle-East initiative will go anywhere without having the U.S. and Israel on board. END COMMENT.
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